

Grand Traverse Audubon Club Newsletter

December 2009
Issue #126

www.grandtraverseaudubon.org
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Bird Notes

Upcoming Events

- ❖ Dec. 17, Thurs., Regular Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Boardman River Nature Center, Photo Fest and Christmas Party: Slides, Video.*
- ❖ Dec. 19, Sat. Grand Traverse Christmas Bird Count. Ed Moehle, 231.947-8821.*
- ❖ Dec. 20, Sun. Leelanau Bird Count, Nate Crane, 231.499.5460.*
- ❖ Dec. 27, Sun., Antrim Bird Count, Jo and John Krag, 231.264.8969.*
- ❖ Jan. 10, Sun. Snowshoe Hike and Birding, Nature Center, Tom Ford, Wild Birds Unlimited, 231.946.0431.

Photo Fest and Party on Thurs., Dec. 17

This is our annual Photo Fest and Christmas Party beginning at 7:00 at the Nature Center. All of you have a chance to show off your print pictures, digital photographs, or videos. Birds you have pictured and trips you have taken are great subjects. We have found that our own members have always produced an interesting and enjoyable evening. A digital projector and computer will be available. Bring 10-15 pictures on a CD or flash drive. After a short business meeting and Christmas goodies, the show will begin.

Michigan's Black Bear on Thursday, Jan. 28

Discover the unique characteristics of this native species. Bear skulls, hides, claws, and mounts may be used as hands-on learning tools in this awesome program. Join Rick Torres, of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, as he shares information on the management of this magnificent animal. The public's attitude towards this animal will determine its future. This is the regular meeting at 7:00 at the Nature Center.

October Annual Meeting

Thanks to Stephany Podolan for wonderful door prizes she garnered from Breeze Hill Greenhouses, Wild Birds Unlimited, Square Deal Country Store, Waterscapes Unlimited of Lake Ann, Wildflowers of Glen Arbor, Timber Lanes Bowling, Cracker Barrel, and Allen Chartier.

Members who contributed prizes were John and Shirley Mesch, Tom and Stephany Podolan, Elise and Joe Brooks, and Betty Green.

Chartier, Project Director for Great Lakes HummerNet provided an exceptional presentation with new facts for everyone. You can participate in the research project initiated in the Autumn of 2001 by keeping track of migration, unusual hummers, and numbers of birds. The gathered data is posted at <http://www.amazilia.net/MIHummerNet/index.htm>. You may also call Allen at 313.443.5502 or email amazilia1@comcast.net.

Upcoming Events, Continued

- ❖ Jan. 28, Thurs.,
Regular Meeting:
“Michigan Black
Bear,” by Rick
Torres of the
Michigan DNR, 7
p.m. Boardman
River Nature
Center.*
- ❖ Feb. 12-15 Great
Backyard Bird
Count.
<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>
- ❖ Sault Trip Feb.
12-14, Barb &
Leonard Graf
231.946.5120.
- ❖ Feb. 25, Thurs.,
Regular Meeting,
7 p.m. Nature
Center.
- ❖ Mar. 13, Sat., 9-
11, Beginning
Birder’s
Workshop, Nature
Center, Tom
Ford.
- ❖ March 25, Thurs.,
Regular Meeting,
7 p.m. Nature
Center.

The Boardman
River Nature
Center is
located on 1450
Cass Rd, just
1.5 miles south
of South Airport
Rd. in Traverse
City, past RR
tracks on left.

*Indicates article
in newsletter

Be certain to pick up a
Field Trip and Monthly
program schedule—a
great guide from Feb.
2010 to Jan. 2011 at a
meeting.

Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

Since 1900, birders have been going out during the Christmas holidays to count birds in their area. This helps to keep track of local bird populations all over the western hemisphere. The count takes place within "Count Circles," which focus on specific geographical areas. Each circle is led by a Count Compiler. Therefore, if you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher. In addition, if your home is within the boundaries of a Count Circle, then you can stay home and report the birds that visit your feeder or join a group of birdwatchers in the field. Our club participates in three counts. You are welcome to join one or all. Contact one or more of the following count leaders:

December 19 - Traverse City Area bird count. Coordinator: Ed Moehle, 231 947-8821

December 20 - Leelanau Area bird count. Coordinator: Nate Crane, 231 499-5460.

December 27 - Antrim Area bird count. Coordinator: Jo and John Kreag, 231 264.8969. Jo and John report that counters are still needed.

From the President, Ed Moehle:

Grand Traverse CBC Date: December 19th

It's getting close to that time of year again when we start to think about the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This year, in conjunction with the counters in the field, I'd like to invite those who live in the count area to be feeder watchers and counters that day. The count circle is centered on 4 Mile. and Hammond Rds.

It is 15 miles in diameter. If you start at the center and draw a circle with a radius of 7 ½ miles in, you'll have an idea of the count area. If you live in that area and want to do this for our club, contact me and I'll mail you the forms that you need.

You can mail the completed forms back to me or come to the Cottage Café at 5:00 p.m. the night of the count for the tally of all the birds counted that day and give me your totals then.

The number of species and individual birds you count will be added to the corresponding count leader's area total. It's a great way to participate and add to the club's total count tally. Call me at 231.947.8821.

Get to Know Your Christmas Tree

December 19, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. / All ages welcome

Join us at the Boardman River Nature Center to get to know your Christmas tree and its kin. Take a hike on the Sabin Trail to learn types and growth habits of the conifers. Based on the Aldo Leopold essay, "Pines above the Snow". Learn to identify conifers, understand what affects their growth and learn about pine tree candles. Dress for the weather!

Bluebird Tips and Suggestions

by Tom Comfort



Bluebird Nestlings at about 10 days
By Tom Comfort

I have joined four bluebird groups from Nebraska, Minnesota, Michigan and the North American Bluebird Society. And, each provides sources of Q&A resources. But, I have also noticed that the 'answers' usually vary from old stand-bys to new-theory. These answers seem to change from time to time or reflect regional variances. So, I will simply offer *suggestions* to common questions about bluebirds and nestboxes:

Question: What should be done with the nestboxes at the end of the 'season' or in the winter?

Suggestion: The common practice is to clean out the nestboxes after the end of the nesting season. You may use a putty knife or scraper and a wire brush.

But, first, let's suggest removing the contents away from the nestbox area to help the birds avoid predators following the scent of the nests. And, we want to recommend gloves and a mask. Mouse nests are a particularly cautious clean-up because of diseases. This scraping and brushing is common after *each* nesting (often twice per year for Bluebirds).

Others suggest cleaning the nestboxes with a mild solution of bleach and water. I find it easier to remove the boxes, scrape them out and put them in a garbage can with the bleach solution. Then, I rinse them and set them out to dry for winter storage.

It would be very uncommon for Bluebirds to winter in NW Lower Michigan. I know that Flint area has wintering Bluebirds and the folks there need to leave nestboxes out for their wintering birds. I find that this is an opportunity to clean and maintain my nestboxes for a safe nesting season. But, they need to be out and ready by mid March.

Question: I am not getting bluebirds but often have nesting tree swallows or chickadees. What am I doing wrong?

Suggestion: It may be that you are not doing anything wrong but a few adjustments to your nestbox placements could improve your odds to attracting bluebirds. First: The tree swallows will use nestboxes that are over 25 feet apart but could be as close as 30-50feet. Bluebirds have the need for larger territory because they are ground feeders and need more acres to provide more food. Therefore, we usually find that Bluebirds need to be spaced at least twoacres or 100-150 yards apart. (There are more variables to adjust this suggestion). When we space boxes close together, they need to be *really* close (12-20ft) to permit one nestbox to be 'available' for bluebirds - the other is for friendly neighbors.

I have taken the alternate approach and found (like many of my friends) that I am getting more Bluebirds with fewer nestboxes. The Bluebirds tend to return from winter a few weeks earlier and may claim the available boxes for the first nesting. The second nesting is often when there is competition for nestboxes with (other) bird species. *When* there is more competition, *then* I place another nestbox about 12-15 feet away. This is too close for another tree swallow but will be available for chickadees or Bluebirds. Each species has slightly different needs and habitats, but the overlap seems to work. Pairing nestboxes has its pros and cons. Nestbox placement can be a little tricky but there are few mistakes.

President's Message: Welcome to our New Board Members **Ed Moehle**

At our October meeting our club elected five members to the Grand Traverse Audubon Club Board. They are: Holly Vaughn, 2nd Vice-President; Karen Crane, Secretary; Shirley Mesch, Newsletter; and Missy Rassel and Stephany Podolan, Members-at-Large. Ed Moehle, John Mesch, Tom Ford, and Cindee DuBey remain in their positions. We want to thank all five for stepping up by filling these positions which will help our club remain vibrant.

We'd also like to express our gratitude to these outgoing board members: Lane Corbin, Elise Brooks, Barb Graf, and Bob Carstens. They have been invaluable to our club. Lane, as secretary, did an outstanding job keeping detailed, informative minutes. Elise was our link to the Michigan Audubon Society. She kept us informed about what they were doing and resolved any issues we had regarding MAS. Barb served many years as a member-at-large and in many other capacities. She's been an asset with all her birding expertise. Bob is one of the longest serving members of the board and has been a club member for many years. We learned from him the important environmental concerns in our area on which we might take action. His birding skills are superb and well known in the community. THANK YOU ALL!

Disc Golf Prevented at Killingsworth Park

Bob Carstens, Environmental V.P., submitted a letter on behalf of our club, with the approval of the board, to prevent the construction of a disc golf course at the Killingsworth Park. Molly and John McCombs have been an active part of the protest as well. Molly thanked the club for its support at the November meeting. Excerpts from Bob's letter follow:

The objectives of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club are the welfare and preservation of the bird life and other fauna, the flora, the resources and the beauty of our environment, especially in the Grand Traverse Area. We shall cooperate with any individual, organization, or governmental unit that shares these objectives. (Bylaws)

In the spirit of the above objectives, the Board of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club went on record in support of those opposing the construction of a Disc Golf Course within the boundary of Killingsworth Park, designated (on page 31 of the East Bay Township Recreation Plan) as a "wildlife preserve."

... we would especially like to express concern regarding the potential impacts of construction of a Disc Golf Course, and indulgence in that sport, upon the State of Michigan designated threatened species, the Red-shouldered Hawk. This threatened hawk species regularly has been reported as nesting in Killingsworth Park for the past eight years, every year since our Grand Traverse Audubon Club instituted an internet birdalert e-mail program.

There is also concern that tree removals to provide obstacle free glide paths for the discs and construction of other structures and elements necessary to play this sport would result in fragmentation of the forest habitat. Ornithological literature indicates that forest fragmentation results in increased nest predation of forest interior dwelling bird species by bird and mammal predators by giving them increased access to the nests of thrushes, warblers, tanagers, vireos and woodpeckers as well as hawks and owls (all of which have been observed at Killingsworth Park by the McCombs). Forest fragmentation is deemed a significant contributor in the diminishment in the population of these species...

Killingsworth Park is a 50 acre parcel located on Chandler Lake Rd. and Pointview Rd. This park offers skiing and hiking trails, a pavilion with tables and a swing set for kids.

Birds Along the Boardman

The Boardman Lake and portions of the river have become very accessible to outdoor people, and have been a joy to birders as well. Bob Carstens was asked to do a bird inventory for TART along the west side of Boardman Lake where Tart hopes to expand the trail soon. In turn, Bob placed a request to Audubon members to share with him any of their sightings. Although birding is good along the trail at any time of the year, the spring has many warblers and in the fall and spring, we'll see a large variety of waterfowl. There have been many unique sightings including the Peregrine Falcon, Great White-Fronted Goose, Ross's Goose, Cackling Goose, Golden Eagle, nesting Merlins, and the Bald Eagle.

Many of the BirdAlerts have come from Ed Kaminski because his work place sits at the southern end of Boardman Lake. And, he has been quick to share these sightings. His list includes about 85 species on the Boardman Lake. Look for his list on our website in the Files section, or send an email to ebkaminski@msn.com.

You can help by submitting your bird list to Bob Carstens at 31rst5ns2@sbcglobal.net. And, you can help complete a portion of the trail with a donation. There is a 1:1 match provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. If you are interested in making a donation to this specific project, please call the TART office at 231.941.4300 or visit the website at www.traversetrails.org and designate your gift to the TART/Boardman Lake Trail project. The Audubon Board approved \$1000 for the Boardman Trail extension, from our Walter Hastings Memorial Environmental Educational Fund.

The extension of the Boardman Lake Trail over the Boardman River and into Old Town neighborhood near Oryana heightened the need for the TART and Boardman trail systems to be joined. The trail link is being constructed as a 10-foot wide paved pathway and an on-road bike route. The connection begins at the Hull Park boat launch north to Franklin Street where it crosses three sets of railroad tracks, then makes an on-road connection past the Old Depot buildings to the existing TART Trail at Woodmere Ave. TART is working with the City of Traverse City on project design and implementation.

Cackling Goose on the Boardman Lake 2009 by Ed Kaminski



Tom's Journal

Tom Ford, Audubon Vice-president and Wild Birds Unlimited's Naturalist, shares his thoughts on nature happenings in our area this month in the WBU online newsletter. Visit them at. www.traversecity.wbu.com

The night is dark, the air is brisk, and once again the Collie Boyz are frisky. Tandemly, they pull me along as if some great adventure awaits somewhere ahead in the inky darkness, and there it is..... a pumpkin orange moon low on the western horizon bleeds through the heavy indigo skies of the brisk November morning.

Overhead, Tundra Swans appear as a ghostly white chevron of pumping wings, knifing through the chilly air. Their soft syncopated conversations are polite as the boyz look up to watch their steady progress to the southeast. The big swans journey to the Atlantic coasts where they will wait out the winter.

Day breaks as snowbirds dance across the neutral palette of November colors, imitating the real flurries that soon will carpet the early winter landscape. Snow Buntings transit through our area just ahead of winter, on their way to open, fertile, agricultural lands to the south where they will find abundant forage not hidden under blankets of snow. (photo of Snow Bunting flock)



On big Lake Michigan, the southwest winds roar pushing up turquoise breakers that crash into piers and breakwalls and pound the shoreline. Four seasoned birders brave the wind driven spray searching for the Purple Sandpiper:

A rare but regular shorebird that is often found among the algae covered boulders and huge concrete hunks that are used to protect lighthouse piers and harbors. We flush a sandpiper but get only a brief glimpse and are unable to identify the species.

Steelhead fishermen are having better success as we watch them haul in the handsome silver trout. A steady movement of Bonaparte's Gull chug over the choppy water surface into the teeth of the gusty blow. It is almost impossible to find bird life in the rolling white-capped surf. We do manage to find a few Common Loon, two Red-throated Loon, and a smattering of other diving ducks and grebes.

Away from the wind and waves, we hope for sightings of Rough-legged Hawk and any of the fall migrants in the open fields and ag lands. Instead, we settle for Honey Crisp, Jonagold, and Gala apples at a roadside stand. We smack on the juicy, sweet fruit and trade conversations of winter birding trips up north for northern owls and winter birds of the eastern upper peninsula.

Closer to home, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and jays have been busy visiting our seed cylinders and peanut feeders. High energy foods are important for winter birds that use body fat stores as fuel for nighttime warmth.

Black-capped Chickadees may use up to 75% of their body fat stores in a single night. This could be as much as 10% of their weight.... or the equivalent of a 150 lb person losing 15 lbs overnight! So keep your feeders full and enjoy watching the birds in your yard



My Experience as A Loon Ranger by Gerri Erickson

During the autumn evening we all spent watching the magnificent Loon presentation at our 2008 Annual Meeting, I realized it was time for me to volunteer to be a "Loon Ranger". A week later the "Michigan Loon Preservation Association" was welcoming me with open arms. They sent me a notebook filled with excellent information and off I went. It was as easy as that. What I didn't realize was that come Spring, from the minute the Loons first arrived on "my" lake until seven months later when the last one left, I would be captivated, almost obsessed with their every move. And the great thing was that I had a purpose, I wasn't just watching for my own selfish pleasure, but that I was actually making a difference. I would be able to contribute to the Loon Association's data bank as well as do my best to make sure these Loons were staying safe from human interference. I loved every minute of it! I'd like to share a journal entry.

The tiny pair of fuzz balls I photographed on the second of June are now over 10 weeks old! They are still being tended by their parents despite having grown practically to full size. The whole family was floating, diving and preening quite close to shore today. The silent and still water of the afternoon offered me great detail. As I watched quite in awe of it all, I found myself thinking back on the season---the steadfast mother that sat tight on the nest through the icy sleet and wind and awful waves, the tiny little newborns that the parents so proudly displayed that day, the gangly, cocky teenagers of last month, to this day, so quiet and serene. The young ones, now robust and strong,



Photo by Gerri Erickson

were preening and cruising independently, only occasionally sneaking over to a parent to snatch the minnow that hung waiting in its bill. There was lots of stretching and shaking and lifting, and then in one of these stretches, while I was focused head-on with him, one of the chick's flapping/lifting turned into running. I could see the strain on his face as he quickly advanced towards me. I thought he was actually going to do it, and get airborne, when suddenly with a big splash and a loud "SMACK!" he came crashing down on his side! His mother quickly sped over and fed him the fish she was holding. He graciously accepted and decided

to rest, floating tightly close to her side in the afternoon sun. My heart soared with the chick's "near" success, but with a tear in my eye, as I know it will be all too soon that "my" Loons will all be able to fly and will start to contemplate their flights south. This was yet another amazing day in a season of such days I have spent watching these magnificent creatures.

Contact me at: mpandge@hotmail.com, the Michigan Loon Preservation Association, an affiliate of the Michigan Audubon Society, which maintains a website with great information at: www.michiganloons.org, or Peg Comfort, GT Audubon member, and area MLPA Area Coordinator for Charlevoix, Antrim, Leelanau and Benzie counties at whitepine@torchlake.com.



**Grand Traverse Audubon Club
Board Members:**

President: Ed Moehle
231.947.8821
Vice Pres: Tom Ford
Vice Pres: Bob Carstens
Treasurer: John Mesch
Secretary: Lane Corbin
Newsletter: Carole Groves
Elected: Shirley Mesch
Barb Graf
M.A.S. Rep: Elise Brooks
Past Pres: Cindee DuBey

Barred Owl Christmas Card

Art work and article by Alice Counts

Barred Owls became one of my favorites a number of years ago. I first heard its cry around a campfire at my place in Birch Run. My law had learned how to call in and she proceeded to do this strange sound. In a few minutes, one flew called back to her. This was my son who learned to call well. Many times we went in the woods at night and brought them in. Last summer, while at my brother's home, one flew in during the afternoon and I finally got a chance to see its true colors. I decided it would be a perfect bird for my 2009 Christmas card, so I painted it.



of my years sitting brother's sister-in-call them let out matter of in and amazed call as would be he summer,

For more information: <http://pelotes.jea.com/Barrowls.htm>
and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barred_Owl

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